



Michigan Association of School Social Workers

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November 27, 2012

To: Senate Education Committee Members
Honorable Phil Pavlov, Committee Chair

Dear Honorable Members of the Michigan Senate Education Committee:

The Michigan Association of School Social Workers (MASSW) applauds the work of your committee and the enthusiasm with which you have embraced the goal of improving Michigan's education delivery system. In regard to SB 1350, and similar bills currently in your committee, the MASSW urges members to not make drastic changes to school choice options during this brief "lame duck" session. We hope, instead, you will begin the process of evaluating the impact of changes recently implemented and take substantial public input throughout the upcoming two-year session.

The increase in public and private education options has raised anecdotal concerns that the MASSW believe should be systematically identified, categorized and studied prior to the implementation of additional changes. The MASSW believes these concerns are becoming systemic to Michigan's education delivery system and are too prevalent to overlook. Following are some concerns identified by our members who serve in several different settings including, public schools and academies, private schools and virtual schools:

- Schools established to educate students experiencing academic failure are returning students who continued to fail back to "traditional" school settings.
- The scenario above tends to occur with a consistent pattern:
 - Students are "returned" after the most significant count day
 - Students and families are encouraged to stay in the new setting with hopes of resolving the identified difficulties, until it is financially beneficial to "let them go."
 - Parents of these students are experiencing increased distrust of academic systems.
- Students with disabilities and who have written Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are not being provided services identified.
- IEPs are being unilaterally re-written by the administration of some innovative settings without benefits of legally mandated process; utilizing various methods to accomplish this task with less savvy parents.
- Individual student progress is increasingly more difficult to track as a greater number of options are available. The result appears to be many poorly achieving students are literally "falling through the cracks."
- Students facing significant barriers to learning (e.g., environmental, physical, social, emotional, etc.) and who are experiencing lack of consistency due to frequent school setting changes or who are not having those difficulties addressed while they sit in a setting until count day passes, continue to fail and parents are left to chase the next "promising solution" that is held before them.

The MASSW does not believe these are issues affecting the majority of students. It is affecting, however, a significant number of students for whom educational reforms were initially devised to help.

It has been our experience that some reforms have spurred significant energy for improving many existing public schools through implementing sound practices and increasing both academic and environmental expectations. We believe it will take some time to realize the results of those changes. Again, we urge that time be taken to evaluate the impact of current reforms and that writing additional specific options into law be curtailed until the full impact of current changes is adequately assessed.

Respectfully Submitted,

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